WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands

Resolution 1134 - Attachment One **September 07, 2004**

Sustainable Forestry Policy Changes

Board of Natural Resources Policy Changes

A. **CIRCUMSTANCES TRIGGERING THE NEED FOR A RECALCULATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE HARVEST LEVEL**

DISCUSSION

State law requires that the Department shall manage the state-owned lands under its jurisdiction, which are primarily valuable for the purpose of growing forest crops on a sustained yield basis. "To this end, the Department shall periodically adjust the acreages designated for inclusion in the sustained yield management program and calculate a sustainable harvest level." (RCW 79.10.320). State law also defines sustainable harvest level as, "Sustainable harvest level means the volume of timber scheduled for sale from state-owned lands during a planning decade as calculated by the department and approved by the board."(RCW 79.10.300(5)).

The legislature envisioned that the sustainable harvest level is likely to need adjustment from time to time, based on the quantity, quality, growth, and availability of the timber resource on state lands. At the time the statute was enacted, the suitable time period was thought to be one decade, with the average annual sustainable harvest level remaining constant during the decade.

Currently, the factors affecting a stable long-term sustainable harvest calculation remain dynamic. Regulatory requirements are in flux, and information about the resource base continues to improve. In addition, new more powerful and flexible computer models have emerged, making it feasible to adjust the harvest level as circumstance changes. At the same time, the fundamental trust obligations and statutory requirements continue to be the foundation of policy.

POLICY

The department, with board approval, will recalculate the statewide sustainable harvest level, for board adoption no less frequently than every ten years.

The department will adjust the calculation and recommend adoption by the board when the department determines changing circumstances within the planning decade suggest

that an adjusted harvest level would be prudent. Such circumstances may include major changes in legal requirements, significant new policy direction from the board, new information about the resource base available for harvest, or changes in technology.

B. DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR THE SUSTAINABLE HARVEST CALCULATION

DISCUSSION

State law defines "sustained yield" as "management of the forest to provide harvesting on a continuing basis without major prolonged curtailment or cessation of harvest." (RCW 79.10.310). A common law duty of the state as trustee is to not favor either present or future trust beneficiaries over each other. Sustained yield management helps accomplish this duty.

Within that broad statutory direction, various interpretations of sustained yield management are possible. Differences in interpretation may relate to the size of areas subject to separate calculations of sustainable yield of timber, for example, either the state trust ownership as a whole or smaller areas; the degree of variability of timber harvest over time; and the aspect of forest management to be the primary focus of sustainability, such as area or volume of timber harvested or retained, or revenue earned.

In the past, the department has divided the forest land base into separate sustainable harvest units based on county boundaries, the department's administrative regions, and several separately treated areas. In addition, the department has set the variability of harvest over time based on a non-declining even-flow objective. The department has calculated sustainable yield based on timber volume. The Board of Natural Resources has expressed a desire for a more flexible system as the basis for the sustainable harvest calculation.

(Lands formerly know as Forest Board Transfer and Forest Board Purchase are now defined in RCW 79.02.010(10) as "State Forest Lands." For purposes of this policy, former Forest Board Transfer lands will be called "State Forest Trust Lands," and former Forest Board Purchase Lands will be called "State Forest Purchase Lands.")

POLICY

For Western Washington the department will calculate, and the Board will adopt, a separate long-term decadal sustainable harvest level, expressed as mean annual timber volume for a planning decade, for twenty distinct sustainable harvest units, as follows: Each of the seventeen county beneficiaries of State Forest Trust lands separately, and all of the federally granted trusts and State Forest Purchase lands in Western Washington together, with the exception that the Olympic Experimental State Forest and the Capitol State Forest shall each have a separate calculation regardless of trust.

In order to ensure intergenerational equity among beneficiaries, within each sustainable harvest unit, the department shall calculate an estimated multi-decade harvest level such

that the mean annual timber volume for any decade should not vary up or down more than 25% from the level of the preceding decade, except that all State Forest Trust lands outside Capital State Forest and Olympic Experimental State Forest shall be treated as a single sustainable harvest unit for purposes of achieving the allowable variation between decadal timber harvest levels. In order to take advantage of shorter term operational or market opportunities, the harvest level for any year within the planning decade may also fluctuate up to 25% plus or minus from the mean annual harvest level adopted by the Board, as long as the decadal mean is sustained over the decade.

Subject to all applicable legal and policy direction, the department will analyze the financial characteristics of forest stands in order to optimize the economic value of forest stands and timber production over time, in calculating the sustainable harvest level, in planning and scheduling timber harvests, in making investments in forest growth, and in searching for the least-cost methods of achieving other forest management objectives.

C. GENERAL SILVICULTURAL STRATEGY APPLIED TO THE TIMBER RESOURCE BASE AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE HARVEST IN WESTERN WASHINGTON

DISCUSSION

The department defines silviculture as the art and science of cultivating forests to achieve objectives. The department uses a flexible, site-by-site approach for evaluating and implementing silvicultural treatments, based on site specific, rotational or long term analysis incorporating return on investment, variable biological conditions, and physical limitations. Site-specific silvicultural prescriptions include intensive activities such as improved planting stock, site preparation, fertilization, and thinning, as budgets allow at the time prescribed activities come due. Innovative silvicultural treatments may be used to create, develop, enhance, or maintain forest biodiversity and health. For example, the objective of the "biodiversity pathways" approach to silviculture, presented by Carey et al (1996) is for simultaneous increases in production of both habitat and income. This approach may be used to create complex, multi-aged stand structures that sustain key forest stand elements to replicate vital ecological functions at the stand and landscape levels.

All silviculture strategies are applied within a context of specific stand-level or larger area objectives to achieve long-term sustainable flow of forest products, services and other relevant values. Stands whose progress toward objectives is below potential are generally chosen for management intervention. Stands selected for regeneration harvests include but are not limited to those that have a low possibility for a positive response to partial harvest regimes.

POLICY

The department will follow legal requirements in maintaining the greatest possible portion of the trust forest lands as on-base.

The department will provide professional management of forestlands through active stewardship of on-base lands. Active management of the land base will be carried out as an integral part of the department's fiduciary responsibilities to achieve, on a landscape basis, a combination of forest structures that over time provide for broad and balanced economic,

ecological and social benefits. The department will use intensive and innovative silviculture to guide the desired progression of stand development to simultaneously produce trust revenue and create structural diversity across the landscape.

The department will target over time 10 to15 percent of each western Washington HCP Planning Unit for old forests based on structural characteristics. In meeting these targets, Old Growth Research Areas will continue to be deferred and existing old growth (as defined by the HCP) and older stands will be a priority focus in developing the HCP Planning Unit targets.